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ABSTRACT

A required course for elementary education majors at Santa Clara University (California), "Introduction to Teaching in a Multicultural Society," evolved during a 6-year period. The course moved from one with an emphasis on promoting equity, tolerance, and improved human relations through curriculum and instructional strategies to one that encourages a critical examination of racism and other forms of oppression with th objective of developing student empathy and advocacy. The course currently uses documentary films and videos to provide students with graphic and controversial views of the United States and a world they did not know existed. In addition, students read articles about race and ethnicity from various points of view and are asked to position themselves ideologically. The teaching methods have also changed from lecture to group discussion and activities designed to provoke thought and encourage student interaction. To increase social awareness, students are required to volunteer 10 hours at a human services agency. An ongoing assignment is to maintain a reflective journal intended to arouse critical consciousness. While one such course cannot effect great changes in students' attitudes, it emphasizes the challenge for educators to engage in a multifaceted attack on students' resistance to issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Excerpts from student journals are included. (AMH)

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, April 4, 1991, Chicago, IL

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When Difference Means Disaster:
Reflections on a Teacher Education Strategy for Countering Student Resistance to Diversity

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Although diversity has become a focus in education in general, its place in teacher education in particular, has not been well established. Grant & Secada's (1990) extensive literature review indicates that there are surprisingly few empirical studies on preparing teachers for diversity. For the past 6 years I have taught a course entitled, "Introduction to Teaching in a Multicultural Society." This course has been the subject of a number of my scholarly inquiries (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990a; 1990b; Ladson-Billings, 1990a; 1990b). This paper describes the evolution of the course from one with an emphasis on promoting equity, tolerance and human relations through curriculum and instructional strategies to one that encourages a more critical examination of racism and other forms of oppression to develop student empathy and advocacy. The paper begins with a description of the teaching-learning context. It is followed by a description of the reflective methodology and an analysis of the data. It concludes with a look toward the challenges that lie ahead for attempting to engage prospective teachers in meaningful learning experiences to enhance their abilities to be more effective teachers in a multicultural society.

The Context

I teach at a predominately white, upper middle-class, Jesuit university. The

university is located in the Santa Clara Valley which has a high proportion of Latino and Asian immigrants. The student body of approximately 3,500 undergraduates (and 3,500 graduates), is drawn from elite Catholic preparatory high schools and suburban upper middle class public high schools. In 1989 the entering freshman class had an average high school grade point average of 3.41 (on a 4 point scale). Their average combined SAT score was 1097.[1] Under represented students of color (African-American and Latino) comprise less than 10% of the student population. I am one of 4 full-time African-American faculty members. Over the past 2 years the discrepancy between the population at the university and the population of the surrounding community (indeed, the population of the state) has been a subject of concern, causing the university administration to issue a position paper urging "Excellence through Diversity."[2]

The course, "Introduction to Teaching in a Multicultural Society," is a part of the required sequence for elementary pre-teaching majors. Additionally, over the past 4 years the course has been cross-listed with the Ethnic Studies program and has enrolled undergraduates from a variety of majors who take the course to fulfill the university's ethnic studies requirement. The first time I offered the course I made several erroneous assumptions. I assumed that the students, because of their upperclass standing, had an adequate background in the history of the United States. I assumed that the students were aware of the dynamics of social inequity and oppression. I assumed that the students were aware of different ideological positions, understood their own positions and could articulate them. These assumptions caused me to structure a course designed to help them

incorporate this prerequisite knowledge into curriculum and instructional strategies that would help students appreciate and value diversity. Because my assumptions were incorrect, the content of the course frequently took digressions to explain background historical and social phenomena. The instructional strategies loss their potential power because the students lacked necessary background knowledge. It became apparent that in order for the course to prepare students to teach effectively in diverse (and monocultural) settings it would need to be revised and reconceived.

The Changes

Unfortunately, many multicultural education courses have come to be known for their celebration of food, festivals and fun (King & Ladson-Billings 1990a). Consequently, some students come to these courses looking for simplistic strategies and "how-to's" that serve to trivialize the significance of people of color in the development of the nation and the world. My course began in 1984 as a serious study of the theoretical and conceptual foundations of multiculturalism. From there the students were to learn about how these theories and concepts can be used to construct multicultural instructional strategies and activities. The course would serve as a kind of scaffolding on which students would begin to hang multicultural content. The erroneous presumption that students were equipped with this content necessitated a different tack. The line of least resistance became a more human relations approach (Sleeter & Grant 1988) that asked students to examine issues like prejudice, discrimination, and equity. I believe I chose this approach because most of

my students had limited contact with people of color and would react more favorably to an approach that dealt with positive group interactions. This compromise was less than satisfying for both the students and the instructor. This approach failed to provide students with an adequate historical context in which to understand either oppression or diversity. It failed to provide me as an instructor an opportunity to challenge the students with ideas and knowledge that ran counter to their beliefs or to stimulate real thinking and not just memorization of pre-digested facts. Over the next few years I began to look for ways to increase the students' knowledge base so that they could examine critically the ways that culture mediates our way of knowing the world, the ways that schools structure inequality, and the ways in which they, as prospective teachers, could make a commitment to social justice and social change. I also felt the need to move my students from their view of culturally different people as victims and understand not only the full humanity of diverse peoples but the ways in which they as white people are privileged by the persistence of racism (McIntosh 1990). This notion of white privilege is one that is met with the most resistance in the class. The students of color respond enthusiastically with examples of their experiences with white privilege while white students provide counter arguments of reverse discrimination. A journal entry from a colleague's course on cross-cultural communication is an example of the anger white students feel regarding this notion:

> *. . . there are plenty of jobs available that does (sic) not require technical training, sometimes people will have to settle for less to get to a goal. If unemployment was such a*

problem then why is the classified section filled with jobs. (On homelessness) . . . our group felt that the demands of some of these people were ridiculous. Many reports show these people as homeless by choice. Many of these people reject help from their family. Many of these people refuse to go to the shelters. There are churches, communes, shelters, etc. for these people. Young homeless should consider joining the military. Rather than sleep in the park all day, these people should seek some employment. . . . "Where there's a will, there's a way."

When asked specifically what white Americans can be proud of this same journal included the following entry:

I was offended that this question was asked. As a white American I'm proud not to be a minority. It was white Americans who wrote the Constitution of the United States that declared "all men are created equal" although it's taken over 200 years to bring this to reality. This is the only country that declared this and put it into reality. White Americans invented electricity, the telephone, computers, etc. White Americans can be proud

> *to be the only race elected as President of the United States - elected by all registered voters (both minority and majority groups). White Americans granted freedom to slaves. We can be proud of Abraham Lincoln and all our presidents. We, as white Americans have a lot to be proud of - just as any ethnic group has things to be proud of.*

Unfortunately, the writer could not see the inherent contradictions in her statements. The notion of white privilege as an invisible force to those who enjoy it is a point that the students of color try to convey to the white students.

One of the first things I had to change was the content of the course. Because the students did not have the historical background to engage in debates about issues of inequity, racism and other forms of oppression I had to find a way to increase their knowledge base. The availability of documentary videotapes and films meant that I could provide students with a great deal of information in a somewhat compressed form. Selected segments from "Eyes on the Prize", the award winning Civil Rights documentary, along with videos on apartheid, Japanese Internment, and campus racism, provided students with graphic and controversial views of an America (and a world) that they did not know existed. In addition, students were asked to read articles about race and ethnicity from various points of view.

Additionally, the students were required to situate themselves ideologically. The kinds of questions that were generated about the videos and readings forced the students to be reflective about their attitudes, beliefs, and values. Although I had deliberately selected certain readings and videos, my decision to minimize lecture as a primary teaching technique made some students more comfortable about the course content. My voluntary removal from the center of the class seemingly allowed the students to grapple with the ideas and issues rather than the personality of the teacher. Several students had expressed some trepidation about taking an ethnic studies course because they felt the professors directed anger at them and deliberately made them feel guilty.[3] During their self-examination the students discover, sometimes painfully, that their experiences and perspectives are not "fair" or "neutral" because they are shaped by their racial and cultural biases. Some students considered themselves politically liberal and were dismayed to find themselves in agreement with conservative thinkers on issues like bilingual and compensatory education. Many were surprised to discover that there were ideological positions other than liberal, moderate or conservative. They had never heard or read a radical critique of schooling. Students were required to select a film produced by a person of color and discuss how the content and the message of the film conflicted with information, beliefs, or values they had previously held. The film list I provided included approximately 25 films including titles such as "El Norte", "A Soldier's Story", "The Ballad or Gregorio Cortez", and "Hollywood Shuffle."

In addition to changing the course content I also changed my teaching methods. Rather than relying primarily on lectures, I structured discussion groups and activities that were designed to provoke thought and encourage more student to student interactions. One of the activities I used was "Is this racism?"[4] In this activity students were given a list of 16 statements and asked to judge whether or not they felt the statements were racist (e.g."The best basketball players on our team are black") or represented some form of racism (e.g. statistical information about the number of black prisoners in the U.S.) The students were divided into small groups to discuss a few of the statements and decide whether or not they felt they were racist. In a variation of this activity[5] I read the statements aloud to the students and have them rate the statements from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree"). Then I re-read the statements and have the students to move to a section of the room that corresponds with the number they selected. The students are often amazed to see with whom they are in agreement or opposition. This activity forces students to publicly declare what they believe and defend it. Often students realize that they may be standing at a particular position with several other students for very different reasons. It is also interesting to see those students who are willing to stand alone at a position and defend it. For many of them it is the first time that they have been called upon to publicly take and defend a position.

In another activity the students are asked to use the current federally determined poverty level for a family of four. Then they are asked to subtract the mean cost of a two bedroom apartment and other necessities from the monthly allotment. I distribute

supermarket flyers to the students and ask them to plan a week's worth of nutritious meals with the money they have available. They are asked to assume that the family is composed of one adult and three school aged children. They are also asked to presume that their children receive free hot lunches at school. During the discussion after the activity the students talk about their frustration with trying to plan a variety of nutritious meals. Unlike a former Reagan Administration official who said that a family of four could manage nicely on the government's food stamp allotment, my students are dismayed that people should have to try to get by on this meager amount of money.

A third activity involves having students analyzing portions of social studies textbooks for ethnocentric, racist, sexist, or otherwise biased and distorted information. The students are asked to come up with strategies for dealing with this kind of material if they are confronted with it in a classroom.

Finally, the course required students to put their newly acquired knowledge and clearer self-understanding into action. During the first few years of the course change students were permitted to select a local public school site in which to observe and suggest changes for improving the multicultural program. Unfortunately, this assignment became self-defeating. Most of the local schools were doing little or nothing to address the students' multicultural needs and because of this they adopted a defensive posture towards my students. Students were rebuffed by administrators and teachers with statements such as, "We don't see color, we treat all of our students like individuals" or " We work on everyone's self-esteem not any particular group's." In a few instances students found a

single teacher working seriously to address the multicultural needs of the children. Consequently, I made the decision to link my students' experiences with those of people who had benefitted least from the social, economic and political order. I worked in conjunction with the university's community service outreach program, The Eastside Project, to provide my students with placements in human services agencies so that they would have greater contact with diverse peoples. Each student was required to volunteer a minimum of 10 hours at one of the agencies. These agencies included, drop out prevention programs, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, senior centers, and low-income child care programs. The students were asked to perform a variety of services by the agencies -- everything from serve meals to sit and listen to clients. Their assignment from me was to see how much they could learn from the people they serviced and to suggest ways they could incorporate that learning in elementary and/or secondary classrooms. Rather than the earlier Human Relations approach, the class was now better characterized as a social reconstruction (Sleeter & Grant 1988) or social advocacy approach.

The Confrontations

Moving my students from the comfortable, "feel good", human relations approach to a social advocacy approach was not without some difficulty. In order to understand what the students were thinking and how they were feeling I required them to maintain a reflective journal. This journal was to help students develop the kind of "critical

reflection" Ken Zeichner (Kennedy 1989) refers to in preparing teachers or what Freire means when he uses the term "critical consciousness" (Freire 1973). Like Yinger & Clark (1981) I believe that "writing, because of its active and personal nature, its cognitive demands, and its feedback characteristics, makes possible unique forms of extended and involved thought. Writing enables both a construction of meaning and an enlarging of reality" (pp.9-10). Yinger & Clark further assert that "journal writing, with its focus on personal thoughts, feelings, and reflections, puts writers into a position to learn at least four important things about themselves; (1) what they know, (2) what they feel, (3) what they do (and how they do it), and (4) why they do it" (p.10). My students' primary focus would be on what they know and what they feel. To help the students distinguish between thoughts and feelings I provided them with a "feelings inventory" that listed close to one hundred "feeling" words such as "confused", "anxious", "angry", "disoriented" so that they could make a clear differentiation between what they were thinking and feeling and to give them a wide range of emotional choices (before providing the feelings inventory, several students wrote only about feeling "mad" or "sad"). I expected that their feelings would provide a starting point for many of our class discussions. However, it was their thoughts (what they knew or did not know) that helped to generate the critical reflection. One theme that emerged in the students' journals was that of miseducation. It is apparent in the journal selections listed below that the students began to question their own education and why they were not given access to certain information and points of views:

My main point of interest of the movie was Martin L. King. I admit I don't know much about him. I have heard varying opinions of him before this class and I really didn't care to read information on him since it did not concern me. I have, as long as I can remember, always heard the press and media praising, but I never listened or cared. I have heard from people I have great respect for, that he wasn't all that great -- more of a trouble maker. . . . While watching (the video) I realized that he was a very good and dynamic speaker. I was really impressed by his ability. I have more respect for the man now, knowing of his skill and what he actually did for the Civil Rights Movement in the form of non-violence. What I plan on doing soon is look (sic) up a few books on M.L. King by both people who support him and people who oppose him to see the different view points and understand more about him. [White male, mathematics major, junior year]

This was my first real exposure to the severity of the Civil Rights Movement. I am amazed at our history books. They give us only the history we are safe from. In high school I was very interested in the Vietnam War and requested that we learn about it. I never got that. They teach mandatory history on how this country got started and the idea of freedom but <u>they do not</u> teach us why it is so screwed up. What could the Civil War mean to kids today when their social situation is so bad? I had no idea of the riots and marches and violence that went on for civil rights. Why wasn't I taught that? [White male, communications major, senior year]

This (video) made me so angry because of how little I knew about the Civil Rights Movement. I'm 21 years old and almost all of this was completely new to me. . . I was appalled and embarrassed by the action of the whites in this video. I don't think I can ever remember being so embarrassed to be white. [White female, liberal studies major, junior]

Another theme that emerged in the student journals was that of self discovery. Here students begin to talk about being confronted with their personal need to change and to see the world through the eyes of others:

> *This class really awakened my subconscious to the way of being prejudice (sic) against. The use of the video, "A Class Divided" really brought this to life, being blue-eyed I could understand what it was like to be criticized because of the color of your eyes or your intellect was determined by the way one looked. . . . I really felt that this class had relevance, too, by showing how the concepts could be applied to the classroom, but I also felt that it helped me become an all-over better person. I know I am not ready to go out and do something big to fight against prejudices but at least I can recognize it and can change myself. [White female, liberal studies major, junior year]*

> *This quarter I spent two hours a week as a volunteer at the Julian Street Inn (a shelter and soup kitchen for the homeless). This*

experience affected me in a very powerful way.

. . .

What I believe Elvin (one of the residents) and many other guests at Julian Street want most is human interaction --someone to talk to. All human beings, homeless or not, mentally impaired or not, are designed to be in contact with other human beings in a significant way. . . .

Being a part of this atmosphere, brief as it was, taught me a few things about our society. It showed me a completely new perspective on life that I had never before been exposed to. I learned quite a bit about the differences and similarities between my life and their lives. . . . Talking to Elvin showed me how very similar he is to me. It was apparent to me that his life could have taken a very different path, and likewise that my life could have taken a very different path. This realization was very sobering to me and it taught me how to empathize with his situation. On the other hand, the world of Julian Street is so incredibly different from my world on campus. I noticed how easy it is to become

narrow minded when my perspectives are constantly being influenced by the same atmosphere. . . . I found it extremely healthy to get away from the four walls of the university . . . to remind myself that there are those nearby who view life in a very different manner than I do. [White female, liberal studies, junior year]

I left today's classroom lecture/discussion feeling a bit disturbed. I guess what I felt was racist. I've never considered myself racist and I didn't like feeling that I was. We had to discuss some statements in class such as "A black family moved in the neighborhood today" and "The best players on the basketball team are black." I was the only one in my group who couldn't see why these were such racist statements. . . . (Later that evening) one of my friends (pulled out my folder) and asked me what it was. As I started explaining our class exercise to him he began asking me why certain statements were considered racist. I began to explain to him as I'd been explained to in class. He started

> *going off about my reasons and how they were dumb or invalid. His feelings were similar to mine at the beginning of the exercise . . . . I disputed with him to convince him why they were racist and even told him why he was blind to it. He, like myself, had never taken that close a look. [White female, liberal studies major, junior year]*

For the students of color in the class, this self-discovery theme became one of ethnic and cultural identification:

> *. . . this was a real soul searching moment for me. In the sorority comments have been made to me like, "Oh, apply you'll get in . . . you're a minority." Comments and jokes go by about green cards. I have even been told, while saying something in Spanish, to "speak English." Before seeing this program ("Racism 101") I probably would have laughed it off. But after this course and the program I can no longer do that. My culture <u>is</u> me and I am my culture. You can't take either one away from the other, and you'd better not try. [Latina,*

liberal studies major, junior year]

. . . let me try to figure out why today's lecture meant a lot to me . . . it's probably because all my life I've been forced to ignore my cultural heritages, my Filipino roots, to try to fit in the All-American, yuppie standards peers have placed on me. Then I came to Santa Clara, the "white-yuppie capital" of the world, and even felt more pressure to fit in, and thus more alienated because I have tried not to. And just when I've become more passive and less resistant to the "homogenization" process, your talk rekindled the fighting "fire" within me. Not only must I reject "homogenization", I must change it so other kids don't have to feel as alienated as I did! [Filipino male, physics major, senior]

What Am I ???

I am "Asian-American!"

I am "Filipino-American!"

And I am Angry. . .

Angry at those who secretly mock my "primitive", "nigger" roots,

Angry at those who called me "Flip", "Vit", "Jap",

I am not Vietnamese.

I am not Japanese

I not a "Flip"

Angry at those who want to "ship" my people back out of (their) xenophobia.

Angry at those who have tried to hide my culture, my pride from me!

Angry, Angry, F_____g Angry!

Angry at this society which frowns upon me dating "white" girls,

Angry at this society which tries so hard to assimilate me into the "system",

Angry at this society which had made me ashamed of my race.

I will continue to date white girls!

I will continue to "buck" the system!

I will not continue to be ashamed of my race anymore. . . .

For I have found new pride,

Pride in the proclamation of four words. . .

Four words which now sum up the essence of my being, my pride, reason for living. . .

I AM FILIPINO-AMERICAN!

These selected sections of student journals do not prove that the changes in the course produced a change in students. They do suggest that students can be led to reflect and become more critical of educational practices even those which they have experienced and that they can consider ways in which they can be a different kind of educator:

How to be culturally relevant[6]*?*
hmm, hmm, hmm
To be culturally relevant
To learn and understand
To be aware and applicable
sensitive and responsible
caring and inclusive
It is a chore, a task, a conscious effort
One needs to be a doer.
[Native Hawaiian female, communications major, junior year]

The Challenges

It would be wonderful if courses like this were some kind of magic bullet. Unfortunately they are not. There is no way to measure the degree or depth of change that has occurred (or if it has occurred) (Rothenberg 1990). However, the need for these courses as underscored by the students' written expressions, suggests that those of us committed to education that is both democratic and multicultural must continue to find

ways to document their effect. Some of the students enrolled in this course are admitted to the fifth year teacher preparation program here at Santa Clara. My colleague, Joyce King and I are looking at how these students differ from their classmates who have not taken the course. Our preliminary investigations do not suggest large differences in the attitudes and beliefs of students who have taken my course and those who have not (King & Ladson-Billings 1990b).

James Banks (1977) concluded that because the racial attitudes of teachers are difficult to change, their negative behaviors toward ethnic students might be more easily influenced by changing institutional norms and practices. Banks further suggests that this is necessary in order to "make it nonreinforcing for the school staff to act negatively toward ethnic students" (pp.25-26). If we look at how colleges and universities are confronting the issues of diversity and multiculturalism we know that many students, professors and administrators are waging pitched battles against a resurgence of racism that is at times more subtle and less responsive to institutional policies and sanctions (Caldwell 1989). This reality means that the effect of one course or one teacher preparation program is likely to be limited. What more must be done?

The attack on student resistance to issues of diversity and multiculturalism must be multifaceted. Fundamental changes in elementary and secondary curriculum and instruction are necessary to thwart the miseducation of students about the multicultural nature of the history of the nation and the world. College and university education must take place in a democratic and multicultural environment. Teacher preparation must be

committed to developing teachers willing to critically examine the social purposes of schooling and who understand their roles in promoting diversity as a value added phenomenon. Professional development programs must assist in-service teachers in meeting the academic, social and cultural needs of diverse students.

On a personal level, the failure to make a deep or lasting impact on my students cannot dissuade me from continuing to explore ways to provide students with opportunities for critical and reflective thinking about racism and other forms of oppression. Social science struggles with the tensions between quantitative and qualitative methodologies (along with tensions between traditional and alternative methodological approaches). However, if I am committed to helping students and prospective teachers to become more reflective and critical about their practice I must be willing to engage in similar critical and reflective activities. At the same time I am asking students to make a moral and ethical commitment to teaching that advocates social justice I must continue to examine critically and reflectively my own practice and find ways to improve it. My own moral and ethical stance must be clear and open to scrutiny by students, colleagues, and administrators. Writing this paper has been one such attempt. By reviewing 6 years of syllabi and pouring over stacks of journal entries I have been forced to ask myself if it really does make a difference for students that I have made substantive changes in the course based on my own intellectual, moral and ethical growth. Perhaps a return to the student journals is helpful in cementing my resolve to continue along this path.

. . . to think I took your class just to satisfy an ethnic studies requirement is funny. Through your class it became even more apparent to me that multicultural (sic) must be met in order for our society to prosper collectively. . . . All of the assignments were fun and exciting. They exposed me to various concepts that will have a profound effect on me and they way I bring up my children. . . . (It) was one of the most interesting classes I've had. . . the concepts from (the class) will stay with me. [White male, communications major, junior year]

. . . I hope you are proud of some of your ED 163 students. I really think that we all have changed. We're not the same group that walked in the first day of class. At least I know I'm not. I think you can be proud, knowing that you have sensitized people, made them more tolerant and understanding, and appreciative of other cultures, and made them want to change the world, in however small a way. [Latina, Spanish major, senior year]

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Notes:

1. Information for the profile of the 1989 freshman class was presented at the 1989 new faculty orientation (Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA).

2. The administration's position paper, "Excellence through Diversity" was the impetus for several student and faculty committees designed to examine ways to increase student and faculty diversity.

3.In a colleague's course a group of students wrote the following in response to a statement about which of their beliefs have been challenged:

> The group was annoyed with the fact we were getting minority groups shoved down our throats. We resent the fact we are made to feel guilty about being white.

4.The statements were taken from Christine Bennett's (1986) Comprehensive Multicultural Education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. I modified the activity to promote more student interaction and discussion.

5.This variation was suggested by my colleague Joyce King who uses this technique in her Social Foundations course.

6.The term "culturally relevant" was introduced to the students from my ongoing research with teachers who are successful teachers of African-American students. For a discussion of culturally relevant teaching see Ladson-Billings (1990) "Culturally relevant teaching: Effective teaching for black students", The College Board Review, no.155, pp.20-25 and Ladson-Billings (1991) "Like lightning in a bottle: Attempting to capture the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of black students", The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,4(3).